

Many

Stu. of the Bi. call the chapter 1 Cor. 15:1-11; 51-16:2
 From which my text is taken - the most
 For the student of the Bible inf. in the N.T.

~~My text this morning is taken from what might be called the most important chapter in the N.T.~~ Paul's letter to the Cor. was written several years before the Gospel accounts; and in the 15th chapt. of that letter we have the earliest, and therefore the most important, testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. | Certainly Paul places this glorious event at the center of the Gospel message and the life of the Church. | Line by line he spells it out, the defeat of sin, death and the grave; the hope embodied in this miracle, the new life promised. | Reading this chapter one cannot help but be thrilled; the reader finds himself caught up in this incredibly good news--this is the heart of it all. | Paul concludes with words that have been immortalized by George Frederick Handel in the Messiah? | "O death, where is thy Victory? O death where is thy sting? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." |

It seems almost blasphemous to read on; for the first verse of the 16th chapt. reads; ("Now concerning the contribution for the Saints.") Handel failed to include this less than stirring phrase in his immortal Messiah: no poet or man of letters has made much of it. | And yet there it is; a blunt sequence to a lofty theological soliloquy. | To be sure, in our Bibles the two motifs are separated by a chapt. marking. | But Paul didn't write in chapters and verses. | He wrote a letter to his friends in Corinth. And apparently ~~seriously~~ there was nothing incongruous, in his mind, about moving freely from lofty theological to something so mundane as an offering.

We think of the Apostle Paul as the first Christian Theologian; the first thinker to consider the good news of Jesus Christ and then to organize it systematically and logically. | This is an apt description of the

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Apostle. ^{For} ~~But~~ he was more than this. In fact, it is somewhat of an insult to think of Paul as a man of theology alone--a man of words, and let it go at that. For Paul, words inevitably led to acts; beliefs were translated into deeds. Paul was merely calling on the Cor. to believe by doing something. For Paul the Christian life was a synthesis of ideas, theological ideas--and concrete action. And so we need not be surprised to hear him move from REsurrection to money; for him, to believe was to do something about it.

This juxtaposition of believing and doing or giving is every bit as important for modern Christians to understand as it was for the 1st Cent. Cor. And yet, it is precisely at this point that contemporary Christianity falls down. The modern Christian thinks of religious faith as a set of propositions to be affirmed; a creed to be stated. The modern Christian thinks he has faith when he has given his intellectual consent to the existence of God. Nothing could be further from the truth. For faith is that belief down deep inside us that expresses itself in the things we do, the way we act. Faith, at least according to Paul, is that special kind of belief that cannot be confined to the mind, but which spills over into the real everyday world of the home and market place.

No better illustration of the difficult quandary we are in can be found than the N.T. command to love one's neighbor. No one with a grammar school acquaintance with the Bible could say that a Christian is free to love or hate another man according to how he feels at the moment. Time after time Jesus told his disciples that the way to love God was to love men. When he was asked about the identity of the neighbor to be loved, he made it clear that even the most offensive person is our neighbor--and as Christians we have no option but to love him. The 1st letter of John is a little more direct; ("If anyone says; "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar.")

And yet today we think nothing of ^{giving our} giving wrath on this group or that; we think nothing of giving our assent to a philosophy of hatred for members of another race; we think nothing of doing this and then walking into

church and saying ("I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord.")
 Apparently, to the modern Christian, faith and life are two separate
entities, having nothing to do with each other. | Faith exists up here in
 the mind, or in the heart or wherever you want to place it--and it stays
 there. | Life goes on--as if it really didn't exist. | ^{And} The Church--once
 the fortress of men who would die for their faith--once that communion
 of Saints about whom it was written; ("Onward Christian soldiers, going forth
 to war") ~~was~~ now finds itself harboring vast throngs of religious and
moral pacifists. | Instead of seeing the Church as that institution which
 by its very nature has to do with economics, politics, the race question,
public morality, integrity and honesty in the public realm, the church
member today insists that his church stay out of these things and confine
itself to religion. | Religion here being a set of beliefs that have nothing
to do with life.

This pacifism has been brewing in our churches, and in our culture
 for a long time. | And against it has risen up a whole movement of activists.
 These people are generally called Existentialists; their faith is that
Truth is not a mental concept, an eternal reality to be hallowed and talked
about and worshipped. | Rather truth, is very down to earth and concrete--
truth is something that transpires when ^{a man} acts with integrity. | Goodness is
 not a virtue sealed in books and prayers; rather goodness is something men do
 to each other. | The First Christian existentialist was the man who ^{moved from here to} ~~said~~ giving
 ("Be doers of the word and not hearers only.") ~~Many others have followed~~
~~his admonition and seen Christianity as a force driving them into a life of~~
~~active participation in the world. Such a man was the late Dr. Tom Dooley~~
~~who reminds himself of the true option in front of him--with the words of~~
~~Robt. Frost "The woods are lovely, dark and deep--but I have many miles to go~~
~~before I sleep."~~

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Paul Tillich the great Christian Philosopher seems it up when he says: ("Truth is seomthing new, somthing which is done by God in history, and because of this, something which is done in the individual life. | Truth is a stream of life, centered in Christ, actualized in everybody who is connected with him, organized in the Assembly of God, the church. | In Christianity truth is found if it is done, and done if it is found.")

This question of doing the truth, of doing the work of Christianity gets very specific when we begin to talk about money. | Money is part of the real world--the world we try to keep separate from our faith. | Just as we want to love God while hating our neighbor, so we want to call ourselves Chrstians while giving an infiitesimal amount of our money to the practical doing of Christianity. | When the Legions of Rome swept up through the continent of Europe, bringing the Barbarian tribes under Roman rule, it was their practice to Baptise the Franks and the Gauls and the Goths into the Christian Faith. | Now these were not pratically peace loving people. Human life was of little value; and it was terminated at the slightest provocation. | The Barbarians realized, however, that their Baptism by immersion was supposed to make them new men; and one of those things which would be changed would be their enthusiastic dispatching of one another. And so they would carry their battle axes into the river with them and as they were immersed hold their right arms and axes high in the air; to prevent that part of them from being changed. | They would then emerge as Christians--all but ^{their} ~~their~~ means of destruction, and life wuld go on as it had before.

We have all committed our lives to Christ; ~~whic not all of us have~~ been emersed, we have promised to live as new men; to become Christ's faithful disciples till our life's end. | I suppose all of us have held something back as we entered our relationship to Christ through his Church ~~we~~ withheld something; something that we didn't want changed by the Gospel. | Obviously

some of us have held our politics out of the water; perhaps it was our economics; if you will allow me to stretch the metaphor, certainly a lot of us have held our wallets and pocket books high and said ("Take me Lord--all I am is yours, all, that is, but this; this is mine. After I've used this as I want to use it I'll see that you get a little of what's left over."

And so when we talk about money in the Church we are really talking about practical Christianity; and practical Christianity is true faith--a faith that exists, not in an ivory tower--or a quiet sanctuary, but in the give and take of every day life. People resent hearing talk about money from the pulpit--and essentially it is a legitimate complaint--but a deeper resentment ought to be over the fact that it is necessary. ~~It's a sad commentary on our faith when the Church of Jesus Christ has to beg for money to carry out its work.~~ The dilemma is crystallized in the following paragraph written by Joseph McCabe:

"You can't scold them into this, for if you do, that may raise money; but it will not be Christian Stewardship. You can't shame people into this, for then you are really encouraging a subtle form of selfishness, for they will give in order to be free from their sense of shame. You mustn't pressure people into giving, for later they will resent it. All devices and methods of raising money within the Church that are not founded on man's response to the Gospel will go to pieces on the rock of man's selfishness."

Where does that leave us? It leaves us right back where we began--with St. Paul announcing the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the same breath urging the Chr. to give their money for the poor in Jerusalem. As we draw near to Campaign Sunday, this is my appeal. Our pledges to the work of the Church--and to the New Building ought not to be given in resent, or in shame; your church should not have to feel hesitatnt to ask you. Together, we should see the realatively simple act of signing a pledge card--as the natural sequence to the affirmations we make on Sunday morning.

When God acted his love became incarnate in a man. Likewise our love for God must become incarnate--it must break out of the realm of the theoretical and become real in the lives we lead--and in our Participation in the work of the Church. This is the only valid basis for your support of the Building Fund and the Church program; and it is to that basis that I appeal. Because God has acted for us--in an outpouring of love and life, we will act in grateful response.

In our concluding moments this morning I want to talk to you very frankly about the project we are about to enter. I will not have another opportunity. I want briefly to point out what it will mean to be a part of the Building of a new church.

In a very real sense, money pledged to the bldg. fund will not be given away, but money invested. For our dollars we will see wood, brick and mortar; for our money we will get a building. A building that will be our Church; a building that will open up new horizons for the church program. We need more space for Ch. Ed. Building Fd. dollars will buy that space. We need a larger congregation--building fund dollars will put us in a better position to serve more people.

Money given to the Church this fall is money invested in the children who will use that building; money invested in our community. ~~Money given to the Church this fall will be invested in the vital work we are doing in our community.~~ Money given to the church this fall will be invested in the vital work ~~wax~~ our church is doing throughout the world. Giving money to the Church, is a means through which you and I can participate directly in doing the word of God here, and in Africa, and in Asia; in outposts of mercy and love throughout the world. You and I cannot travel to all these places; but we can be there, through our dollars which make the work possible.

You know we Americans are willing to pay for what we really want. As a nation we are going to pay some 30 Billions of dollars to put a man on the moon. Now I can't even comprehend that much money, but an editorial by James Reston in the N.Y. Times helped me to understad what the money could do. ["]30 billion dollars would do the following: it would give a 10% raise in salary for 10 years to every teacher in the U.S.; it would give 10 million to each of 200 colleges; it would finance seven year fellowships at 4,000 a year for 50,000 scientists and engineers; it would buid and endow 53 new universities; it would create 3 more permanent Rockefeller foundations and after doing all this there would still be 100 million left over."

The purpose of this illustration is not to question the wisdom of the venture, although it does automatically for me. Rather it is to show that as a nation we are willing to pay for what we value when we are detrmined to do something--we do it whatever it costs us.

In this building program we are not talking about 30 billion dollars, or the American people; but we are talking about this congregation of 150 people. We are asking that each one give serious consideration to what really matters--and how far we are willing to go to provide for it. We have been as specific as our plans would allow us to be; we have said that this new Church will be built if each member family gives 3 cents out of every earned dollar. We have said that the work of Jesus Christ can continue through this Church for another 3 cents out of each dollar. I cannot feel that this is excessive.

One week from today will be Advent Sunday; it will also be Thanksgiving Sunday. And of course it will be the first day of the week we have designat as the Bldg. Campaign. In light of this very significant convergence the Session has decided that we should celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Com. o that day. It is a time for considering God's goodness and offering our

Thanksgiving. | It is a time to look forward to God's greatest act of giving the birth of Jesus Christ. | And it is a time to recall that Jesus Christ gave himself freely and completely for us.

As we approach this week, let us open ourselves to the full weight of these events. | Let us joyfully affirm our belief. | With the Apostle, let us sing anew the ^{incredibly} ~~incredibly~~ good news that God has visited his creation. | And then, hearing the Apostle let us follow through with the natural sequence of faith; ~~belief and response~~. | Let us see this project as our way of saying: "We Believe."